



ANTHOCHÆRA INAURIS.

J. Gould and H. C. Richter del et lith.

C. Hallmark del. Imp.

ANTHOCHÆRA INAURIS.

Wattled Honey-eater.

Anthochæra carunculata, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 321.—Gould, Syn. Birds of Australia, Part I.

Creadion carunculatus, Vieill. Gal. des Ois., tom. i. pl. 94.

Wattle Bird of the Colonists of Van Diemen's Land.

By nearly every author who has had occasion to mention or refer to this species, it has been confounded with the bird originally described by Latham under the name of *Merops carunculatus*, which bird is strictly confined to New South Wales and South Australia, while that here figured is I believe exclusively an inhabitant of Van Diemen's Land; hence it becomes necessary to give the latter a new specific appellation, and I have selected that of *inauris* as indicative of the peculiar feature by which it is distinguished, namely the great length of the pendulous ear-drops. The vast primæval forests of *Eucalypti* clothing the greater portion of Van Diemen's Land, whose recesses in many parts have never yet been trodden, afford it an asylum not only where food is abundant, but where it is safe from the attack of man; from these retreats however it frequently emerges, and visits the flowering *Eucalypti* of the more open forest in the Upper Derwent districts, where forty or fifty individuals may be frequently seen on a single tree. Even in the vicinity of Hobart Town and the islands of South Arm and Bruny it may be observed, but in far less numbers, at all seasons of the year. The neighbourhood of the Macquarrie Plains is a locality particularly favourable to this bird, where hundreds are annually shot and sent to the markets of Hobart Town for the purposes of the table. It exhibits but little shyness of disposition, and almost any number may be obtained without much trouble. It is highly prized as an article of food, and in winter becomes so excessively fat as to exceed in this respect any bird I ever saw, the entire body and neck, both internally and externally, being completely enveloped. I have been informed that a large tea-cupful of oil may be procured from two of these birds, and that as it gives a better light, it is sometimes used in lieu of candles; after the breeding-season it becomes thin and spare, the male then weighing on an average only six ounces. This bird feeds almost exclusively on honey and the pollen of the *Eucalypti*; the only other food detected in its very diminutive stomach being the remains of coleopterous insects. Its whole structure is admirably adapted for procuring this kind of food; its long tongue, with its brush-like tip, being protruded at will into the honey-cups of the newly opened flowers, a succession of which appears with every rising sun throughout the year, upon one or other of the numerous species of *Eucalypti*.

The same restless disposition appears to be common to all the tribe of Honey-eaters, and this bird is as active and quick in its movements as the smallest of the genus, hanging and clinging to the branches in every possible variety of position; and when thirty or forty are seen on a single tree, they present a very animated appearance. Its flight, which seldom extends farther than from tree to tree, is very similar to that of the Magpie of Europe. Its note is a harsh and disagreeable scream, resembling in loudness and somewhat in tone the call of the Pheasant; by some persons it has been compared to the sound produced by the retching or vomiting of man. Both sexes have the wattled appendages beneath the ear, but they are less developed in the female, whose size is also smaller than that of her mate.

Although I found several of the nests of this species in various parts of the colony, I failed in procuring the eggs, which are still desiderata to my cabinet. The nests were moderately large cup-shaped structures, formed of fine twigs and grasses intermingled with wool, and were usually built on some low tree, such as the *Casuarina* or *Acacia*.

Crown of the head and back of the neck striped with black and grey, the centre of each feather being black, and its external edges grey; back and shoulders dusky brown, the shaft of each feather buffy white; wings deep blackish brown, the external margins of the primaries slightly, and the secondaries broadly fringed with grey; tips of all the primaries white; tail much graduated; the upper tail-coverts and two middle tail-feathers grey, the remainder blackish brown, and the whole tipped with white; chin and under tail-coverts white; throat, breast and flanks grey, each feather having a central mark of blackish brown, which is much enlarged on the lower part of the breast; centre of the abdomen rich yellow; bill black; corner of the mouth yellow; irides very dark brownish black; feet light flesh-colour; claws black; bare skin round the ear, and the upper part of the long pendulous wattle which hangs from below the ear white, gradually deepening into rich orange at its extremity.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size.